



THE BTC REVIEW

The Newsletter of The Breaking the Cycle Initiative

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THIS ISSUE:

Changing Our Response to Drug Users

The Breaking the Cycle Model

Research and Evaluation

Breaking the Cycle is sponsored by the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the National Institute of Justice, in partnership with other Justice Department and Federal agencies. It is a systemwide intervention strategy designed to identify, supervise, and treat all drug users in the criminal or juvenile justice system. Its hypothesis is that a system of integrated testing, treatment, graduated responses, and supervision will reduce drug use in a defendant population. This, in turn, will reduce recidivism, improve social functioning and health status, and promote more effective use of system and treatment resources.

Breaking the Cycle is being implemented in the adult justice systems of Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; and Tacoma, Washington, and the juvenile justice system of Lane County (Eugene), Oregon. Additional information about the initiative is available through:

Spurgeon Kennedy
Breaking the Cycle Program Manager
National Institute of Justice
810 7th Street, NW, Room 7115
Washington, D.C. 20531

PROGRAM BRIEF

Changing Our Response to Drug Users

In four jurisdictions nationwide, criminal and juvenile justice practitioners are taking part in an initiative whose goal is nothing short of changing the way their systems “do business” with drug using adults and juveniles. Breaking the Cycle is a joint effort of the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the National Institute of Justice, in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office of Justice Programs’ Drug Courts Program Office and Corrections Program Office, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. It is a systemwide initiative to identify and assess drug-using defendants, place them in appropriate substance abuse interventions as soon as possible after arrest, and ensure compliance through the application of the court’s coercive powers. Breaking the Cycle is being implemented in the adult criminal justice systems of Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; and Tacoma, Washington; and the juvenile justice system in Lane County (Eugene), Oregon.

THE BREAKING THE CYCLE STRATEGY

Breaking the Cycle tests the idea that early identification and assessment of drug-using defendants, followed by individualized treatment and supervision—augmented with the court’s coercive powers—throughout the life of the case can reduce drug use and recidivism. Reduced dependence on drugs also should improve defendants’ physical, social, and economic well-being and promote more efficient use of system and treatment resources. The Breaking the Cycle “strategy” includes frequent urinalysis, individualized case management and treatment plans, and graduated sanctions, incentives, and judicial supervision to influence drug users’ behavior. The initiative also includes a strong research and evaluation component.

THE NEED FOR BREAKING THE CYCLE

The desire to improve our response to drug users reflects the prevalence of substance abuse in the nation's defendant population. Half to three quarters of adult defendants and between 41 percent to 65 percent of juvenile delinquents have drugs in their system when arrested.¹ Eighty percent of State prisoners admit to past drug use and one in six committed their crimes to obtain money to buy drugs.² Youth are using drugs at a much earlier age,³ making adult drug abuse and criminality more likely. Many of the factors associated with recidivism and delinquency also are linked to drug use. As a result, drug users have greater problems with family and community relationships, physical and mental health, work and school performance, and emotional disorders.

Research suggests that drug testing combined with strong judicial oversight and immediate and meaningful responses to positive tests and other misconduct can curtail drug use and recidivism. Breaking the Cycle applies this hypothesis to the “real world.” By implementing the model in the four demonstration sites, NIJ and its partner agencies hope to offer a fundamentally different approach to handling drug users and to describe to the criminal and juvenile justice fields what we have learned.

The Breaking the Cycle Model

Under the Breaking the Cycle model, a neutral agency not aligned with prosecution, defense or a particular treatment modality identifies and assesses all drug users before the initial court appearance, then recommends appropriate treatment and monitoring conditions to the court. The court sets each drug user's release or detention status, and includes substance abuse intervention as part of its order.

Drug users securing pretrial release or sentenced to local community supervision are assigned to a case

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manager. The case manager, along with a substance abuse treatment provider, creates an individualized supervision plan of continuous drug testing, substance abuse treatment and other court-ordered conditions. They then monitor compliance with these plans and report on the client's treatment and compliance status at each subsequent court appearance. Case managers and the court apply immediate and graduated rewards for positive behavior (for example, negative tests or progress in treatment) and graduated sanctions for noncompliance.

Detained drug users receive detention-based substance abuse treatment and education. If eventually released to community supervision, these individuals are assigned a case manager and placed into a community-based treatment and supervision plan.

For the Breaking the Cycle model to succeed, the following elements are essential.

SYSTEM COLLABORATION

Breaking the Cycle requires the participation and support of nearly every agency in the criminal and juvenile justice system as well as community-based drug treatment and social service providers. Agencies work together to provide a seamless delivery of drug testing, treatment, and supervision from arrest to case termination. System collaboration includes joint planning, adjustment of agency policies and procedures when needed to meet Breaking the Cycle's goals, and joint staffing and funding of initiative functions.

EARLY INTERVENTION

All drug users are identified and assessed as soon as possible after arrest. Assessments capture admission

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of drug use, evidence of prior drug use, and treatment history. Courts assign these individuals to a substance abuse intervention—which can include drug testing, treatment, and education—that is appropriately intense, integrated within an overall supervision plan, and backed up by specific sanctions and incentives.

INDIVIDUALIZED TREATMENT PLAN

Effective treatment and supervision plans address the factors associated with a defendant’s drug use. These plans are tailored to a drug user’s needs and are flexible enough to change as the individual’s behavior changes.

Under Breaking the Cycle, drug testing and treatment can range from regular, randomized urinalysis to full residential treatment. Besides drug treatment, the court can order conditions such as weekly reporting, curfews, and electronic monitoring.

SANCTIONS AND INCENTIVES

The idea behind sanctions and incentives is that certainty of action is more important to drug users than the severity of the consequences. Therefore, each instance of compliance or noncompliance carries a reward or sanction that is immediate (applied as soon as possible after the specific behavior), graduated (scaled to fit the specific behavior), and enforced by the case management agency or the court.

JUDICIAL OVERSIGHT

The nationwide success of drug courts has shown that judicial oversight of drug monitoring and treat-

ment conditions can help reduce drug use and criminal behavior. This involvement allows the court to apply leverage to help individuals lead drug-free lives. They also allow for heightened sanctions such as jail or restructured release orders.

Under Breaking the Cycle, judges impose and enforce drug testing and treatment conditions. They also schedule regular progress hearings to review a drug user’s progress. This ensures strong judicial oversight aimed at controlling one of the most prevalent underlying causes of crime—substance abuse.

Research and Evaluation

Breaking the Cycle was designed as a demonstration project, to test the hypothesis that a fully integrated system of testing, treatment, graduated sanctions, and supervision will:

1. reduce drug use in the subject population;
2. reduce recidivism and delinquency in this population;
3. improve social functioning, including family and community relationships, as well as work and school performance;
4. improve drug users’ physical and mental health; and
5. promote more effective use of justice system and treatment resources.

For this reason, a rigorous multi-site evaluation is part of the Breaking the Cycle initiative. This evaluation includes both process and impact components, as well as a cost analysis of implementing Breaking the Cycle. The evaluators will document the strategic planning and implementation processes in the four demonstration sites, assist the sites in tracking various performance indicators, and ultimately develop guides for other jurisdictions attempting to implement a model similar to Breaking the Cycle. In addition, by employing a rigorous research design, evaluators will compare drug use, recidivism, and the social functioning of drug users participating in the initiative with an appropriate comparison group.

Breaking the Cycle represents a challenge to both drug users and the justice system. Drug users must confront their addiction and its consequences on their lives. Intervention lasts as long as the individual is in the system—drug users cannot “fail” their way out of treatment or supervision. Breaking the Cycle requires the criminal or juvenile justice system to provide sufficient treatment services for released and detained drug users pretrial and post-sentence and to develop a mechanism to continue treatment and supervision as the individual moves through the system. NIJ, ONDCP, and the other Breaking the Cycle partner agencies are confident that through the comprehensive evaluation, the initiative will yield critical information about the feasibility and effectiveness of the Breaking the Cycle concept.

Next Issue

The next *BTC Review* takes a closer look at the four Breaking the Cycle demonstration sites: Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; Tacoma, Washington,

and Lane County (Eugene), Oregon. Featured will be each site’s lead agency for the initiative and the different approaches each is taking in planning and implementing Breaking the Cycle.

NOTES

1. *Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program: 1997 Annual Report on Adult and Juvenile Arrestees*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 1998. NCJ 171672.
2. *Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1998. NCJ 172871.
3. *Substance Abuse and the American Adolescent*, New York, NY: The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, Commission on Substance Abuse Among America’s Adolescents, August 1997.

